

Message Text

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PAGE 01 LONDON 16764 01 OF 02 031635Z

53

ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 /059 W

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R 052136Z NOV 75

FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6104

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

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AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY DUBLIN

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PGOV, PINT, UK(NI)

SUBJECT: NEW THREAT TO LABOR MAJORITY

REF: (A) LONDON 9945; (B) LONDON 756

SUMMARY - CORRUPT PRACTICES CHARGES AGAINST LABOR MP JOHN RYMAN REPRESELT NEW THREAT TO LABOR PARTY'S NARROW SINGLE SEAT MAJORITY IN HOUSE OF COMMONS. IF RYMAN IS CONVICTED HIS SEAT WILL BECOME VACANT. WHILE SUCH A DEVELOPMENT WOULD NOT AFFECT GOVERNMENT'S WORKING MAJORITY IN HOUSE, IT WOULD COST LABOR ITS RIGHT TO MAJORITY ON PARLIAMEN-TARY COMMITTEES, AND THAT WOULD PLAY HAVOC WITH GOVERN-LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 02 LONDON 16764 01 OF 02 031635Z

MENT'S LEGISLATIVE PROGRAM. MOREOVER, THERE IS SOME

DOUBT THAT LABR COULD WIN BY-ELECTION IN RYMAN'S CONSTITUENCY. ACCORDINGLY, WE ANTICIPATE GOVERNMENT WILL MAKE A CONCERTED EFFORT TO PERSUADE ONE OF TWO CATHOLIC MPS FROM NORTHERN IRELAND TO ACCEPT LABOR WHIP, THUS PROTECTING GOVERNMENT'S MAJORITY POSITION. END SUMMARY.

1. LABOR PARTY'S ONE-SEAT MAJORITY IN HOUSE OF COMMONS (REF A), ALREADY THREATENED BY EXPECTED CONVICTION OF FORMER FUGITIVE MP JOHN STONEHOUSE, CAME UNDER FURTHER PRESSURE NOVEMBER 1 WHEN LABOR MP JOHN RYMAN WAS SERVED WITH SUMMONS ALLEGING CORRUPT PRACTICES IN OCTOBER 1974 ELECTION. RYMAN, A BARRISTER WHO DEFEATED LABOR INDEPENDENT EDDIE MILNE IN CLOSELY CONTESTED ELECTION, IS ACCUSED OF FILING FALSE DECLARATION OF CAMPAIGN EXPENSES. HIS CAMPAIGN MANAGER WAS ALSO SUMMONED UNDER SAME CHARGE.

2. ALLEGATIONS, WHICH APPEAR TO BE WELL FOUNDED, CENTER ON PRINTING COSTS -- WHICH EXCEEDED CAMPAIGN SPENDING LIMIT, WERE NOT DECLARED IN STATEMENT OF CAMPAIGN EXPENSES. AND WERE PAID BY RYMAN FROM HIS PERSONAL FUNDS. INVESTIGATIVE REPORTING BY PROVINCIAL NEWSPAPER REPORTEDLY UNCOVERED THESE IRREGULARITIES, AND OUR SOURCES IN COMMONS REPORT THAT PUBLIC PROSECUTOR HAS ASSEMBLED STRONG DOCUMENTARY CASE AGAINST RYMAN.

3. UNDER ELECTION EXPENSES LAW, RYMAN'S CONVICTION WOULD AUTOMATICALLY VACATE HIS SEAT, WIPING OUT LABOR'S CURRENT MAJORITY IN HOUSE AND TRIGGERING BY-ELECTION PROCESS. RYMAN'S CONSTITUENCY IS OVERWHELMINGLY LABOR AND WOULD ALMOST CERTAINLY BE HELD BY LABOR IN BY-ELECTION UNLESS MILNE, WHO HAS STRONG PERSONAL FOLLOWING IN AREA HE REPRESENTED IN PARLIAMENT FOR 14 YEARS, DECIDES TO CONTEST SEAT AS INDEPENDENT (COMBINED RYMAN/MILNE VOTE WAS 41,000, WITH LESS THAN ONE HUNDRED VOTES SEPARATING THEM, AS COMPARED TO 15,000 FOR COMBINED OPPOSITION CANDIDATES). TEMPORARY VACANCY OF RYMAN'S SEAT WOULD NOT CONSTITUTE

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PAGE 01 LONDON 16764 02 OF 02 031638Z

53
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DANGER TO GOVERNMENT'S EFFECTIVE WORKING MAJORITY IN COMMONS, NOR WOULD ACTUAL LOSS OF SEAT. BOTH, HOWEVER, WOULD GIVE GOVERNMENT SERIOUS PROBLEM ON ANOTHER SCORE. ONCE GOVERNMENT LOSES ITS NUMERICAL MAJORITY, ITS RIGHT TO MAJORITY REPRESENTATION ON STANDING AND SELECT COMMITTEES IS ELIMINATED. AS A RESULT, GOVERNMENT COULD NOT CONTROL COMMITTEE PROCESS, AND OPPOSITION, AT LEAST IN THEORY, COULD THWART GOVERNMENT LEGISLATION BY AMENDMENT AND PROCEDURAL DELAY FOR DURATION OF VACANCY. EVEN IF SITUATION WERE TEMPORARY, DAMAGE DONE BY UNCONTROLLED COMMITTEES WOULD HAVE TO BE REMEDIED SUBSEQUENTLY ON LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 02 LONDON 16764 02 OF 02 031638Z

FLOOR OF HOUSE, DELAYING PROGRESS OF LEGISLATIVE PROGRAM.

4. COMMENT: WE UNDERSTAND GOVERNMENT WILL SEEK TO AVOID LOSS OF COMMITTEE CONTROL BY PERSUADING SDLP MEMBER GERRY FITT OR NORTHERN IRELAND INDEPENDENT FRANK MAGUIRE TO ACCEPT LABOR WHIP. IT IS ASSUMED, HOWEVER, THAT BOTH FITT AND MAGUIRE WOULD DEMAND QUID PRO QUO ON GOVERNMENT'S NI POLICY WHICH GOVERNMENT MIGHT NOT BE PREPARED TO MEET (THIS IS ESPECIALLY TRUE IN MAGUIRE'S CASE). OUR SOURCES IN TRANSPORT HOUSE AND PARLIAMENT PROFESS TO BE

UNINFORMED OF MILNE'S INTENTIONS IF BY-ELECTION IS CALLED,
THOUGH THEY BELIEVE OFFICIAL LABOR PARTY CANDIDATE WOULD
HAVE TOUGH TIME DEFEATING HIM AND, IF ELECTED, HE WOULD
ALMOST CERTAINLY NOT BE OFFERED OR ACCEPT LABOR WHIP.
UNCERTAINTY ABOUT MILNE'S INTENTIONS, OF COURSE, PROVIDES
FURTHER INCENTIVE FOR GOVERNMENT TO REACH ACCOMMODATION
WITH INDEPENDENT WHO WILL ACCEPT WHIP.

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